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Professors' Advice on Vietnam

What two professors, both distinguished ex-diplomats, told the new round of the Fulbright hearings is that Uncle Sam often behaves like a "nervous Nellie" on the world scene.

Prof. George F. Kennan, former ambassador to Russia and Yugoslavia, said our policy towards the Soviets is "full of contradictions and hesitations." He suggested we "should be forthcoming and gracious as befits a great nation" and "not act like a little, tiny, frightened country."

Prof. Edwin O. Reischauer of Harvard, former ambassador to Japan, said we have a self-defeating tendency "to interpret everything in terms of a Communist conspiracy" and have bedeviled ourselves with the "idea that the Communists are supermen."

Uncle Sam, they argued, should be more human facing outward. He should be firm but not overbearing, helpful but not officious, rational, tolerant and quick to take advantage of the "normal impulses" of nationalism that is the real threat to monolithic Communist expansion.

They advocated, in short, a foreign policy based on noblesse oblige, a concept that was shattering to some of the case-hardened Red-baiters on the committee.

"We were born to liberty and to plenty," said Kennan. "We didn't have to fight for these things; our ancestors did it for us." Our good fortune should not be a source of complacency, he said. Instead,

it imposes on us a greater obligation to moderate our political views.

Reischauer, speaking with an academic freedom the senators must have envied, went even further. We should, he suggested, "admit to the world we made a historic mistake" in intervening in Vietnam—an involvement, he said, "we stumbled into."

"I think we have too much face in the world," he said.

Several conservatives on the committee were ruffled by these attacks on chauvinism, complacency and what they regarded as the "realities of the situation." They pressed the professors for specifics.

It happens that while both sympathize with the administration on the need for remaining in Vietnam, they dissent on the bombing of the north: Kennan diffidently, because he does not know all the factors; Reischauer unequivocally, because he feels "our concept that we would bring them to the table by bombing was a complete psychological misunderstanding."

The commander-in-chief in the White House, while he might object to the content, could have found no fault with the tone.

Kennan explained, "in contrast to many people, I have a very high degree of faith in the good will and seriousness of the people who are guiding our policies."

Reischauer dismissed the idea that our presence in Vietnam had contributed to the downfall of communism in neighboring Indonesia.

"A group of generals hit back," he said crisply, disposing of a favorite State Department thesis. "I don't think they were stopping to figure out where American military power was; they were fighting for their lives."

"But," he added diplomatically, "I think there is more dependence on our power and good will than most people will admit."

Reischauer encountered resistance when he blithely suggested that the Chinese dragon has more smoke than firepower.

"Maybe I've been over-impressed by the briefings from the Atomic Energy Commission, the military and the Central Intelligence Agency," he said dubiously.

Both professors were more resigned than the doves to our presence in Vietnam and more hopeful about our future with China than the hawks. Reischauer held up the Japanese as examples of cool in the face of the Chinese nuclear menace. He had observed "no great nervousness" among them, he told the Senators.

It was, in sum, two bad days for cliches on Capitol Hill. Not all the senators were persuaded by the uninhibited academicians, the unorthodox ideas. But comforted by the presence of the TV cameras, they kept Kennan for four hours. And when Reischauer concluded, Sen. Wayne L. Morse, D-Ore., a man not easily pleased, said, "If I were President, I would make you my secretary of state."